

## We'll still scrap gun registry, PM says

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OTTAWA — No law will ever entirely prevent tragedies like the shooting rampage at Montreal's Dawson college, Prime Minister Stephen Harper said today.

But he suggested his government remains committed to scrapping the controversial long gun registry and promised to look at "more effective" laws.

In a brief televised appearance before reporters, Harper said political debate over how the shootings might have been averted should wait until all the facts are in.

Still, he made a point of noting that existing gun laws didn't stop a gunman from killing one student and wounding 19 others Wednesday.

"The laws we have didn't prevent this tragedy, which is why our government will be in the future — because of this incident and many others — looking to make our laws more effective," Harper said.

His Conservative government has already introduced legislation to scrap the gun registry and to increase sentences for gun crimes.

Jay Hill, the Conservative whip, told reporters the shooting will not prompt any second thoughts about eliminating the registry. But at least one Tory MP, Garth Turner, predicted the government will have to adjust its thinking about gun control if it wants to retain any hope of making inroads in Quebec in the next election.

Quebecers have always been the most supportive of the federal gun registry, which was introduced in the wake of the 1989 massacre of 14 female students at Montreal's Ecole Polytechnique.

"I would imagine that certainly sentiment in the province of Quebec will be extremely strong to reignite as much gun control as possible and that obviously will have national implications because Quebec is important in the Conservative plan at the moment," Turner said.

Harper called the shootings "a shocking and appalling tragedy." But he said such incidents are difficult to predict or understand.

"You know you really ask yourself how do you explain somebody who wants to end their life and wants to end it by killing other people, other people they don't know just for the sake of killing them? It's impossible to explain and comprehend.

"And I have no explanation for it and, in a sense, let's hope none of us ever gets to the stage where we can understand it."

Harper did not seem inclined to try to crack down on websites and computer games that glorify killing and which the Dawson shooter, Kimveer Gill, apparently enjoyed.



CP PHOTO

Three yellow roses sit on a fence outside Dawson College in Montreal Thursday, Sept. 14, 2006.

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"We as a society have trouble squaring our outrage at some of the images we see, some of the messages that are communicated to people — young people, in particular — with our belief in freedom and our desire to avoid censorship," he said.

"Whether there's something we can do to control it, I can't tell you that, but I can tell you that nothing excuses what the killer did yesterday."

Bloc Quebecois Leader Gilles Duceppe said just because no law can stop every gun crime, that's no excuse for inaction. He said the gun registry should not be scrapped.

Duceppe also said police should monitor websites for signs of disturbed individuals who might go on killing sprees, in much the same way police monitor the internet for pedophiles.

NDP Leader Jack Layton offered his own prescription, saying the Dawson shooting "is another tragic reminder of why the federal government needs a more effective strategy to control the trade in illegal firearms."

The three guns used in Wednesday's rampage were legally registered.

Montreal Liberal MP Marlene Jennings, herself a graduate of Dawson college, predicted that Harper will court a backlash in Quebec if he scraps the registry. Nor will Quebecers buy other tough law and order measures as an alternative, she predicted.

Pollster Nik Nanos of SES Research said Harper might be able to sell elimination of the gun registry if he wraps it into a broader ``tough on crime agenda." Such an agenda, while traditionally unpopular in Quebec, might have "more juice" in the wake of the latest rampage.

Harper also offered condolences to the family of the young woman killed in the shooting rampage and said his thoughts are with the victims still in hospital.

He said he spoke to Quebec Premier Jean Charest and Montreal Mayor Gerald Tremblay on Wednesday night and offered any help they might need.

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